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The logo for The Centre for Social Justice, featuring the text "THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE" in white, uppercase letters on a dark red background.

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PRESS RELEASE FROM THE CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Dramatic increase in police incidents involving ‘legal highs’, CSJ reveals

The number of police incidents involving ‘legal highs’ have increased dramatically in many parts of England, new figures obtained by the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) reveal.

The number of incidents soared across 16 police forces that responded to a freedom of information request by the think-tank.

In Greater Manchester, for example, the number increased 17-fold in two years, from six in 2012 – to 104 this year.

In West Yorkshire there was a 25-fold increase over the same period – from 13 to 324 this year.

The CSJ has called for a robust response from the Government, including new police powers to close shops that persist in selling ‘legal highs’.

This comes after recent CSJ analysis showed that the number of people in treatment for taking ‘legal highs’ soared by 216 per cent in England in the last five years.

The number of deaths associated with the use of ‘legal highs’ (or New Psychoactive Substances) increased from 12 in 2009 to 97 in 2012 in England.

“As well as posing worrying health risks, these figures suggest ‘legal highs’ are placing an increasing burden on public services,” said senior CSJ researcher Rupert Oldham-Reid.

“It is too easy for people to walk into high street shops and buy these drugs – many of them as dangerous as Class A substances.

“If we want to start responding to the problems caused by ‘legal highs’ we need to clamp down on those making a living out of selling them.”

The CSJ said the UK has the highest number of ‘legal highs’ users amongst young people in Europe.

It has called for police and courts to be given new powers to close ‘head shops’, of which there are around 250 in the UK, that sell many ‘legal high’ substances.

It wants the Government to implement legislation similar to a scheme run in Ireland, where authorities slashed the number of ‘head shops’ from more than 100 to less than 10.

ENDS

For media inquiries, please contact:

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Notes to the editor

‘Legal highs’ refer to New Psychoactive Substances, some of which have since been made illegal, but often still sold in ‘head shops’.

Responses obtained using the question: *For each of the last most recent four years for which figures are available, how many incidents have been recorded where the term ‘legal high’ has been logged?*

Police Authority	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
South Yorkshire	-	6	18	118	465
Nottinghamshire	-	1	4	26	51
Wiltshire	-	2	1	1	14
Leicestershire	-	4	10	24	65
Derbyshire	-	0	8	27	77
Cambridgeshire	6	5	5	9	16
Lincolnshire	-	7	57	347	820
Avon and Somerset	6	5	2	11	33
Greater Manchester	5	1	6	29	104
Norfolk	2	20	35	93	258
Hertfordshire	-	4	6	9	39
Northumbria	-	2	2	24	108
Devon and Cornwall	2	2	16	88	-
West Yorkshire	-	4	13	88	324
Cheshire	3	3	13	26	63
Northamptonshire	2	9	13	11	22

The Centre for Social Justice

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) is an independent think tank established in 2004 to put social justice at the heart of British politics. In June last year, the CSJ was awarded UK Social Policy Think Tank of the Year 2013 at Prospect magazine's Think Tank Awards.

In 2007 the CSJ published its landmark report, Breakthrough Britain. This publication, which set out 190 evidence-based policy recommendations to tackle poverty in Britain, transformed the social policy and political landscape and was awarded Publication of the Year by Prospect Magazine in 2008.

Since Breakthrough Britain the CSJ has published over 40 reports which have shaped government policy and influenced opposition parties. This has included the seminal paper Dynamic Benefits, which led the Coalition Government's welfare reforms.

Further to this, the CSJ manages an Alliance of around 350 of the most effective grass roots, poverty-fighting organisations. The CSJ is able to draw upon the expertise and experience of Alliance charities for research work and media inquiries. Journalists wishing to conduct grass-roots research into social problems can be put in touch with front-line charity directors and staff.